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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/23/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [MASS](#)  
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: REQUEST FOR UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES

REF: STATE 98031

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires James R. Moore, for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

1. (C) Charge and Pol Chief met Foreign Minister Bogollagama on July 20 and informed him according to reftel that the U.S. could not provide Unmanned Aerial Vehicles to the Sri Lankan military at this time. Charge explained that the U.S. interagency process had determined that the targeting and surveillance functions of the UAVs would augment the Sri Lankan military's offensive capabilities. He emphasized that it was U.S. policy to help Sri Lanka combat terrorism, but not to encourage expanded offensive operations.

2. (C) Bogollagama did not appear surprised by the decision. He noted that Sri Lanka's request was for unarmed UAVs for surveillance only, not for an armed, lethal capability. Charge reiterated that we understood this, but that it was the U.S. interagency consensus that the surveillance and target identification capabilities would facilitate offensive operations, such as airstrikes against Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) positions in the north. The U.S. therefore regretted not being able to comply with the request. Bogollagama accepted the decision, but told us candidly that Sri Lanka was already trying to acquire UAV assets elsewhere.

3. (C) Charge then reviewed the state of U.S.-Sri Lankan security cooperation, especially U.S. 1206 assistance for maritime interdiction, and particularly the U.S. help on maritime radars. He assured the Foreign Minister that the U.S. was prepared to continue to assist Sri Lanka combat terrorism, in particular for measures that are essentially defensive in nature. Bogollagama expressed appreciation for this. He noted that Sri Lanka was especially interested in any future opportunities to acquire another U.S. surplus Coast Guard cutter to help with interdiction of Tamil Tiger arms shipments. Charge said Embassy would inquire again whether such a vessel might be available.

4. (C) Charge emphasized that security assistance requests from Sri Lanka were coming under increasing scrutiny, both within the Administration and especially by Congress. Absent an improvement in the human rights environment in Sri Lanka, and in the event of a widening conflict in which the GSL was taking the offensive, it could become more difficult to obtain Washington approval for such requests.  
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